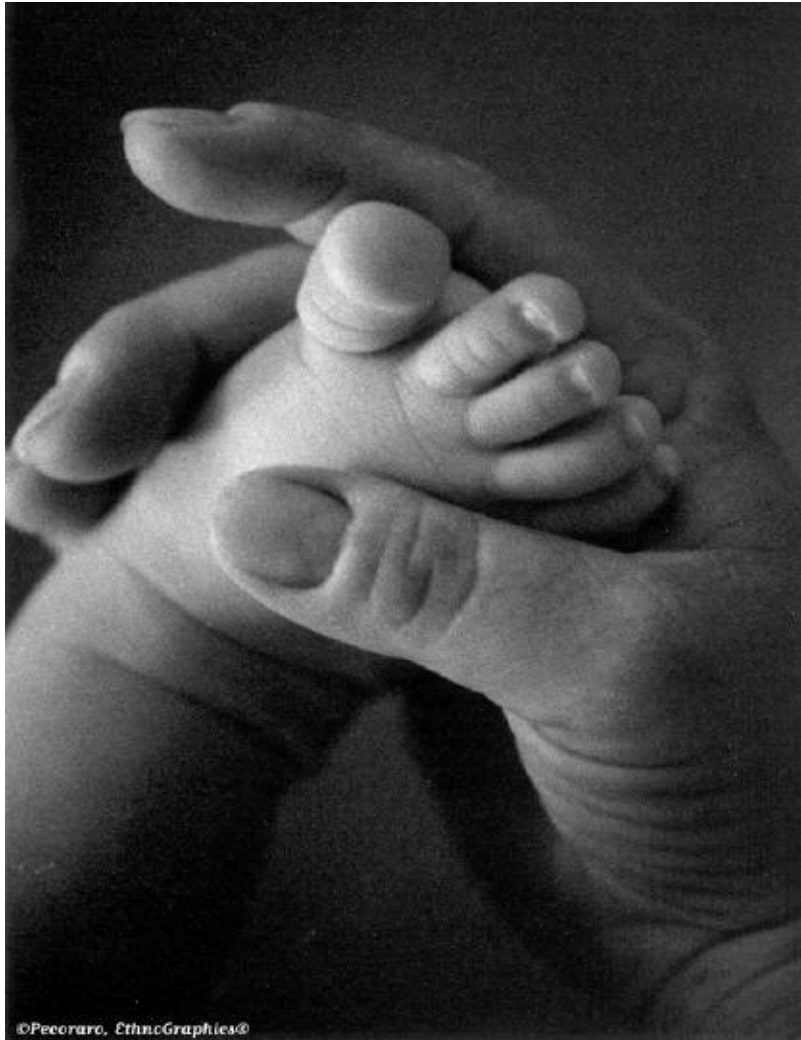




CHILDCARE BENEFITS FOR AMERICORPS MEMBERS

PARENT MANUAL



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FOREWORD

Welcome to **AmeriCorps CARE**! You and 20,000 others have made a commitment to answer the call to strengthen your communities through service, and to develop the ethics and skills for productive, active citizenship. We at **AmeriCorps CARE** applaud your dedication and wish you success in your endeavors.

AmeriCorps CARE recognizes that childcare needs to be consistent and trustworthy to ensure your success as an AmeriCorps Member and a positive experience for your child. Consequently, the childcare program has been carefully designed to give you a variety of options and on-going support in choosing and customizing care for your child.

This handbook will provide you with helpful information to make it easy and rewarding to choose a qualified Caregiver and place your child in a positive and supportive childcare setting. We hope the information presented will address most of the questions you may have. Please be sure to read this handbook carefully.

Should you have any questions or need additional assistance during your term of service in AmeriCorps, you may contact **AmeriCorps CARE** at 1-800-570-4KID (4543) Monday through Friday from 8:30 am to 5:30 pm (Eastern Standard Time).

WHAT IS AMERICORPS CARE?

AmeriCorps CARE is a program administered by the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRA), on behalf of the Corporation for National Service. The purpose of **AmeriCorps CARE** is to assist Members with finding quality Caregivers and to administer all childcare reimbursements directly to those Caregivers. In order to give support to AmeriCorps Members needing childcare while performing service duties, the **AmeriCorps CARE** program is designed to bring together local Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (CCR&R's) and professional experience in the field of service. Therefore, various resources are available to ensure high quality, accessible childcare.

The AmeriCorps CARE staff is dedicated to help you:

- **Identify and evaluate childcare options**
- **Work with community-based childcare organizations to identify a childcare setting that meets your needs and addresses your concerns.**
- **Place your child in a safe, nurturing childcare environment**

WHAT ARE THE AMERICORPS CHILDCARE BENEFITS?

A full-time Member, who is determined eligible on the basis of household income, may use AmeriCorps childcare benefits to pay for a variety of childcare such as Family Home-Based childcare and Center-Based childcare. The “Types of Caregivers” section gives more detailed information on the different options available to Members.

Through AmeriCorps CARE, the following childcare benefits are provided to eligible AmeriCorps Members:

- **Support from community based Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies for choosing childcare, including a list of Caregivers and vacancies.**
- **Support and assistance from an AmeriCorps CARE Child Care Coordinator.**
- **Direct and timely reimbursement of childcare fees to the selected qualified Caregiver.**
- **Support and guidance when changing childcare options.**

AM I ELIGIBLE TO RECEIVE CHILDCARE BENEFITS?

You may be determined eligible to receive AmeriCorps CARE childcare benefits provided that:

- **You are a full-time Member of AmeriCorps, serving 1700 hours within a 12-month period OR 900 hours in a 6-month period with documented/written approval from the Corporation for National Service.**
- **You are a parent/legal guardian/custodian of a child under 13 years of age who resides with you. If legal guardian or custodian, you must be able to provide supporting documentation.**
- **You have a family income that does not exceed your state’s income eligibility guidelines for assistance, according to the Child Care and Development Fund Act.**
- **You need childcare *to be paid for* in order to participate in AmeriCorps.**
- **You are not currently receiving a childcare subsidy from another source.**

HOW IS MY ELIGIBILITY DETERMINED?

Your Program Director will determine your eligibility to receive childcare benefits through AmeriCorps CARE. Your eligibility is based on the factors listed in the section above. AmeriCorps CARE has provided your Program Director with the necessary tools (i.e., income eligibility chart and summary sheet for your state) to aid in determining your eligibility. You must work closely with your Program Director to ensure that the Child Care Eligibility Application, related forms, and supporting documentation are complete, approved, signed and promptly forwarded to AmeriCorps CARE for approval and processing. Documents submitted to AmeriCorps CARE without the Program Director's approval and signatures will be returned and thereby delay processing. Once AmeriCorps CARE receives a complete and correctly submitted application, it will require 3-4 weeks, from the date it is received, to process.

SELECTING CHILDCARE

If you have already selected a Caregiver, an AmeriCorps CARE Child Care Coordinator will:

- Review the Caregiver Information and Registration Form for completeness and accuracy with you and the selected Caregiver.
- Contact the local licensing agency or CCR&R to determine if the selected Caregiver is legally qualified per the state's requirements.
- Offer assistance if the selected Caregiver is not legally qualified, by helping the Caregiver become qualified or helping you to arrange alternate childcare.
- Negotiate childcare rates with the Caregiver and explain the reimbursement process to you and the Caregiver. You will then receive a Welcome Packet with childcare coupons, instructions for completing them, and our reimbursement policies.

If you need help finding childcare, an AmeriCorps CARE Child Care Coordinator will:

- Work with your local CCR&R to help you choose a legally qualified Caregiver, per state requirements, who is able to accommodate the child in a safe, nurturing environment that addresses his/her unique needs.
- Offer further assistance if childcare cannot be found or an additional search is required.
- Contact you with information and assistance in finalizing childcare, once the local CCR&R has found 3-5 legally qualified Caregivers.

- Refer you to Child Care Aware if you visited and interviewed with all of the Caregivers you were referred to, and are still unable to finalize arrangements for childcare. Childcare Aware, (www.childcareaware.org), is the only national consumer education hotline (1-800-424-2246) that will assist parents, caregivers, and others in the selection of childcare or in locating resources about childcare, child-related and family issues by linking them with a CCR&R in their community.

WHO IS A QUALIFIED CAREGIVER?

A legally qualified caregiver is one who meets all licensing and regulatory requirements, as specified by their state. Contact your Program Director or an AmeriCorps CARE Child Care Coordinator for more information.

NOTE: The Corporation strongly supports freedom of choice in selecting an appropriate Caregiver. The Corporation also encourages you to place your child in a stable childcare environment where he/she can best thrive.

Refer to the "Summary of Caregiver Types " (at the back of this handbook) for a description of the various types of Caregivers you may select from. Please be advised that not all types of Caregivers are considered legal in every state.

WHAT IMMUNIZATIONS SHOULD I GET FOR MY CHILD?

AmeriCorps CARE recommends that children be fully immunized prior to acceptance in any childcare setting. Members are encouraged to discuss the Caregiver's policies on immunizations during the interview. For information on immunizations, talk with your family doctor. If you need further assistance, please contact your local CCR&R.

HOW DO I INITIATE REIMBURSEMENTS TO MY CAREGIVER?

The AmeriCorps CARE Caregiver Information and Registration Form must be completed by the Caregiver and signed by you (the Member), the Caregiver and the Program Director. This form must be completed legibly and in its entirety, including all signatures. After completion, make a copy for your own files and *mail* the original form to the AmeriCorps CARE office along with all supporting documentation. The reimbursement process cannot begin before this form has been received, approved, and processed by AmeriCorps CARE. For unlicensed/unregulated Caregivers this includes a copy of their social security card. For licensed/regulated Caregivers this includes a copy of their license/registration. Faxed documents will not be accepted.

Many Caregivers require signing of a contract/agreement that is specific to their program. We encourage you to read the contract/agreement carefully before signing and discuss the details of such a contract/agreement with the Caregiver so that misunderstandings can be avoided. Be careful that the contract/agreement does not contain policies that are contradictory to the policies of **AmeriCorps CARE** or to the language in the Caregiver Information and Registration Form. If you do find any contradictions, please discuss them openly with the Caregiver before signing. For example, **AmeriCorps CARE** only reimburses the Caregiver the month *after* services have been rendered and upon completion and receipt of a childcare coupon. Some Caregivers require childcare fees to be paid in advance, which **AmeriCorps CARE** *is not able to do*.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I WISH TO CHANGE CAREGIVERS?

At any time during your term of service you may change Caregivers. If you decide to change Caregivers, you must:

- Notify **AmeriCorps CARE** at least fifteen (15) calendar days before the actual change. This ensures sufficient time to complete the steps necessary to terminate reimbursements to the old Caregiver.
- Obtain and complete the **Caregiver Change Request Form** and the **Caregiver Information and Registration Form** for the new Caregiver.
- Mail copies of the fully completed and signed forms to the Program Director for approval and signatures. Either you or the Program Director must then mail all completed forms and supporting documentation to the **AmeriCorps CARE** office. The same procedures that were followed to process your original Caregiver will be followed to process all subsequent Caregivers.

If you must change or terminate childcare services *suddenly* for any reason, contact your AMERICORPS CARE Childcare Coordinator immediately at 1-800-570-4543.

WHAT IF MY CAREGIVER WISHES TO TERMINATE SERVICES?

Your Caregiver has the right to terminate childcare services at any time. Still, the Caregiver is required by AmeriCorps CARE to notify you and the AmeriCorps CARE office at least fifteen (15) calendar days prior to terminating childcare services, except in cases of emergency.

AmeriCorps CARE will assist you with locating another qualified Caregiver. Contact an AmeriCorps CARE Childcare Coordinator if you have any questions concerning termination of childcare services.

WHAT ARRANGEMENTS SHOULD I MAKE FOR BACK-UP CHILDCARE?

We strongly recommended that you consider a back-up childcare arrangement in case your Caregiver is ever unable to provide care when needed. When interviewing a prospective Caregiver, it is a good rule of thumb to ask what days the Caregiver will be closed. If the Caregiver is closed on days other than Federal holidays or closed for a specific period of time, AmeriCorps CARE can reimburse a back-up Caregiver for providing services in the interim.

In order to reimburse the back-up Caregiver in a timely manner, please follow the procedures for selecting and confirming the Caregiver, as instructed on the previous pages. The same procedures, that were followed to approve and process the primary Caregiver, must be followed to approve and process the back-up Caregiver. AmeriCorps CARE will not pay more than one Caregiver for the same child, during the same time period.

MONTHLY REIMBURSEMENT PROCESS

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CHILDCARE REIMBURSEMENTS?

During the initial consultation, an AmeriCorps CARE Childcare Coordinator will discuss, with your Caregiver, the childcare allowance and the reimbursement process. The childcare allowance is determined *by your state* based on the following:

- **The age of the child**
- **The state or region in which the childcare will be provided**
- **The type of Caregiver and type of setting in which services will be provided**
- **The hours of care being provided (part-time, full-time, etc.)**

Please ask your Caregiver to have all of this information handy when speaking with the Childcare Coordinator.

Registration, Late, Early Withdrawal and All Other Fees

AmeriCorps CARE does not pay for any registration fees, late fees, transportation, snacks, or any other miscellaneous fees. The AmeriCorps Member is responsible for all such fees.

Each Caregiver should have policies for picking up your child late. AmeriCorps CARE suggests that during the interview with the Caregiver, you reach an understanding about what fees, if any, apply in such instances. Remember, you (the Member) are responsible for such fees, if applicable.

HOW DO I USE THE CHILD CARE COUPONS?

You will receive a book of 12 monthly coupons (childcare vouchers) for each approved Caregiver. Detailed instructions for completing and submitting the coupons are included in your Welcome Packet, which is mailed as soon as your application has been approved and processed. If you have further questions, please feel free to contact a Child Care Coordinator. (Please remember that a complete and accurate application may take 3-4 weeks to process.)

Reimbursements are based on the childcare rate(s) previously negotiated with the Caregiver and the days/hours of care provided.

Coupons must be submitted *after* the last day that childcare has been provided for that month. AmeriCorps CARE will not process coupons received before the 25th of the month that care was provided.

The original coupon (*no* photocopies or faxes) must be completed accurately and signed by both you and the Caregiver. Coupons must be completed according to the instructions. Any omission of information will result in a returned coupon and delayed reimbursement to the Caregiver. Please work with the Caregiver at the end of each month to ensure that the coupon is complete, accurate and properly signed.

The Caregiver will be reimbursed within ten (10) business days from the receipt of a complete and accurate coupon.

AmeriCorps CARE receives hundreds of coupons a day. Please wait five (5) to ten (10) business days from the date the coupon was mailed, before calling about reimbursement that has not been received. This allows time for the postal service to deliver the coupon and our staff to process it for reimbursement.

Extended Care Authorization

Members must obtain written authorization from their Program Director or Site Supervisor for any change in a child's schedule including *extended* or *additional* care hours (24-hour/overnight care, weekend care, evening care, etc.). Caregivers can only be reimbursed for *extended* or *additional* care hours if the Member was required to participate in an AmeriCorps related activity.

Please note that 24-hour/overnight care is not legal in all states. Therefore, Members needing extended care should check with their Program Director beforehand, since some extended care may not be reimbursable to the Caregiver. Program Directors will have information on which states allow 24-hour/overnight care. To avoid delays in Caregiver reimbursements, the authorization letter should be attached to, and submitted with, the corresponding month's coupon.

*Caregivers will not be reimbursed for extended care without proper authorization on file. If an authorization letter cannot be attached to the coupon, it may be faxed or mailed to our office and must include: 1) the specific date(s) *extended care* was provided, 2) the hours *extended care* was provided on each day, 3) the reason(s) *extended care* was needed, and 4) the Program Director's or Site Supervisor's signature. All authorization letters must be documented on AmeriCorps or program site letterhead. Handwritten notes on blank or notebook paper will not be honored.*

REVIEWING BENEFITS

DO MY BENEFITS NEED TO BE RE-DETERMINED DURING MY TERM-OF-SERVICE?

You are required, by the Corporation for National Service, to inform your Program Director and AmeriCorps CARE about any changes in family size, income, marital status etc., as such changes may affect your eligibility to receive childcare benefits.

Failure to comply with this requirement may result in your being responsible for re-paying the Federal government for any funds issued on your behalf, while you are not eligible for the childcare benefit.

In the event that there are changes, you must complete and submit another Childcare Eligibility Application. This process determines if you are still eligible to receive childcare benefits.

As supported by the Corporation for National Service, AMERICORPS CARE RESERVES THE RIGHT TO RANDOMLY CHECK THE ACCURACY AND VALIDITY OF APPLICATIONS AND RELATED DOCUMENTS AT ANY TIME.

Any attempt to mislead the Corporation for National Service or AMERICORPS CARE and/or misrepresent information provided, may constitute fraud and intent to improperly obtain and misuse Federal Funds, both of which are punishable by law.

WHAT CHANGES MUST I REPORT?

You are required to report the following changes in your status, which may affect your eligibility to receive childcare benefits:

- **Change in family's gross income**
- **Change in family size**
- **Change in marital status**
- **Change in hours of service in AmeriCorps (i.e., if you become a part-time Member)**
- **Change of Caregiver. In this case, *you* must complete a Caregiver Change Request Form *and* a Caregiver Information and Registration Form for the new Caregiver.**
- **Change in hours of childcare needed**
- **Your child turns 13 years of age**
- **You no longer need childcare through AMERICORPS CARE.**
- **You leave AmeriCorps for *any reason*, for *any length of time* (i.e., you resign, are terminated, take temporary leave, etc.)**
- **You begin receiving a childcare subsidy from another source**

WHAT IF I NEED TO ADD ANOTHER CHILD TO MY CHILDCARE BENEFIT?

If you need to enroll another child for the childcare benefit, you must submit a new Childcare Eligibility Application and Caregiver Registration Form that includes the names of all children receiving care, including the child you are adding. **Failure to do so will result in non-payment for the additional child.**

Failure to report any of the changes listed above, may constitute a fraudulent use of Federal and/or State funds and may be punishable by law.

HOW DO I REPORT CAREGIVER COMPLAINTS AND CONCERNS?

All complaints regarding possible misconduct by a Caregiver, up to and including child abuse or neglect should be reported immediately to the state's licensing authority. For assistance in finding your state's licensing authority, you may call the local CCR&R. They are experienced in handling these situations in a highly confidential and professional manner, and in quickly investigating and resolving such cases. Members are encouraged to report all concerns regarding possible safety hazards, Caregiver malpractice, the quality of childcare, etc., to the CCR&R. If assistance is needed in locating a local CCR&R, please contact AMERICORPS CARE at 1-(800) 570-4543 Monday through Friday from 8:30 am – 5:30 pm (EST).

TERMINATION/RESIGNATION FROM AMERICORPS SERVICE

If you resign or are terminated from your service with AmeriCorps you must:

- **Notify AMERICORPS CARE immediately at (1-800) 570-4543.** *(Failure to do so may result in your being responsible for repayment of any funds paid to your Caregiver after your end-of-service date. We will then follow the necessary procedures to finalize reimbursements to your Caregiver.*
- **Complete the Termination of Child Care Benefits Form with your Program Director.**
- **Mail in any unused coupons/coupon booklets back to AMERICORPS CARE.**

In addition, your Program Director will advise you on the proper procedures, as specified by the Corporation for National Service's regulation, for leaving the program.

PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE ARE NO TRANSITIONAL CHILDCARE BENEFITS AVAILABLE THROUGH AMERICORPS CARE.

NONDISCRIMINATION

The Corporation for National Service and **AMERICORPS CARE** apply Federal nondiscriminatory regulations for programs receiving federal funds.

AmeriCorps Members and other program staff may not be discriminated against on the basis of race, color, national origin, religious, sex, age, political affiliation, sexual orientation or disability.

TYPES OF CAREGIVERS

Listed below are definitions and descriptions of different types of Caregivers from which you may select to care for your child. In choosing childcare, take into account the age and developmental needs of the child and the ability of the Caregiver to meet and foster those needs as well as the positive reinforcement the Caregiver will offer your child.

Child Care Center

Established licensed setting where children are cared for in a group away from their homes for all or part of the day. Childcare Centers include nursery schools, preschools, and Parent Cooperatives. The objectives of Centers vary, from taking care of children whose parents are working, to preparing the children for school. Childcare Centers provide care for groups of children ranging in an age from infancy through school age.

School Age Program

A program offering before and/or after school care to children enrolled in kindergarten or higher grades. These programs may operate from school buildings or other licensed facilities and may be operated by the school itself, parent groups or local Childcare Centers. The purpose of School-Age Programs is primarily to provide care for children during such times of the day when regular school classes are not in session. They are not intended to extend or replace regular school classes.

Head Start

Head Start is a federally funded, comprehensive child development program for low-income preschool children. AmeriCorps CARE does not pay for Head Start programs.

Family Child Care Home

A private home where a Caregiver provides childcare services for children from infancy through school age. The care is provided at the home of the Caregiver (not in the child's home). Family Day Care is licensed or registered by the state in which the Caregiver resides. The number of children allowed in a Family Day Care Home varies depending on the number of adults providing care in the home setting.

Group Child Care Home

A private home where two or more Caregivers provide childcare services and education for seven (7) or more (usually a total of about 12) children in a private home and who employ one or

more paid assistants to meet child-to-staff ratio requirements. Group Day Care is licensed or registered by the state in which the Caregivers reside.

In-Home Child Care

Care provided by a non-relative who comes into the child's home to provide care. Sometimes the Caregiver brings his/her own children. Generally speaking, the Caregiver provides services through a personal agreement with the parent(s) and works without training or professional affiliations. (May not be legal in your state).

Relative Care

Care usually provided by an aunt, uncle or grandparent of the child. Care may be provided in the relative's or the child's home. (May not be legal in your state. Contact AmeriCorps CARE for more information).

NOTE: Members selecting Head Start, EEEP, State Pre-Kindergarten or other publicly sponsored early education programs will be eligible for additional daycare needed to address the needs of full-time care Members. However, such public programs will not be reimbursed for that portion of the day in which the child is enrolled in the educational portion of the program.

While Member choice is emphasized in identifying childcare through AmeriCorps CARE, regardless of the type of Caregiver selected, it must be determined that the Caregiver is qualified to receive reimbursements from AmeriCorps CARE.

